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China and Japan still manufacture medicines containing rhino horn, which are exported all over Asia and sometimes even to Europe.

# Rhino poaching and conservation

by Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne

Over the past few years rhino populations in Africa have fallen so dramatically that the problem has become a major issue in conservation circles, but the action taken so far has been ineffective. Rhinos are being poached in practically every country where they exist.

How quickly a major rhino population can succumb to poaching is well illustrated by the case of the Central African Republic (CAR), which had perhaps as many as 3,000 rhinos in 1980 and in excess of 1,500 in 1982 when the local illicit hunters gave way to Chadians and Sudanese, who moved in because they had eliminated their own elephant and rhino populations. Unfortunately, the northern part of CAR, where most of the rhinos lived, was drier than usual in 1983. The rhinos congregated near the waterholes and became easy targets. Like the CAR poachers, the Chadians used rifles, but the Sudanese hunted on horses, using spears.

According to Jean-Marc Froment, a biologist teaching in northern CAR at the time, the poachers sold the rhino horn to businessmen in villages for about US\$ 95 per kilo; they in turn offered it to dealers in towns, especially in Ndele, which seems to have been the main trading centre and where Arabs with CAR citizenship organised its transport by lorries carrying wood to Khartoum. From there, the horn was moved to Sana'a, North Yemen, the largest market in the world for it. A small proportion of rhino products went to CAR's capital, Bangui. Dried rhino skin was made into charms to be

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***In order to stop poaching in the three countries of tropical Africa which still have sizeable populations of rhino, protection for the rhinos in the wild is essential as is an attack on the root cause of poaching—the trade in rhino horn.***

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worn on a band on the upper arm for good luck. Most of the horn that reached Bangui was sent out of the country by air, sometimes in diplomatic pouches. However, there is a small market in Bangui for ground rhino horn mixed with water, which is reputed to give men 'extra strength'. In 1982 Froment actually saw a bottle of rhino horn tonic in the office of a government minister in Bangui!

Although conservationists reported a serious decline in rhino and elephant numbers in CAR at the 1981 IUCN Wankie Meeting, there was not sufficient information available to formulate a conservation policy. Therefore, high priority was given to obtaining scientific data on the status and distribution of these animals. It took four years before reasonably accurate information could be compiled. In May/June 1985 an aerial survey of the northern part of the country was carried out by Froment, Iain Douglas-Hamilton and G. Doungoubé, but not a

single rhino was then seen.

A wildlife consultant, recently in CAR, believes that the elephant and rhino conservation there has been the worst in Africa. Today there are less than 200 rhinos remaining, a 95 per cent decline in five years. The country has only 200 game scouts to patrol all its wildlife, although since the completion of the survey the government has agreed to supplement this woefully inadequate number with recruits from the Presidential Guard. Still, mismanagement and corruption are rife. Under present conditions it is almost impossible to protect rhinos in CAR. A possible solution is to take some of them out of the country for safekeeping.

There are only three countries in tropical Africa left with large populations of rhinos: Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. In Zambia's Luangwa Valley there were between 4,000 and 8,000 black rhinos in 1973. By 1985, there were only 300 to 500 left, and no more than 1,000 in the whole country, according to ecologist Dale Lewis.

A detailed field study carried out by Nigel Leader-Williams in the Luangwa Valley between 1979 and 1982 showed that 72 per cent of all the rhinos that died had been killed by poachers' bullets, even though the area was patrolled by government anti-poaching staff. To illustrate the poaching problem, look at the elephant census carried out in 1985, which noted that elephants had declined in number by 30 per cent to 40 per cent since the previous survey in 1979. The rhino population most likely reflects the

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same trend at present. According to recent interviews with the National Parks and Wildlife Service officers, members of Save the Rhino Trust and Phil Berry (former warden of SRT's Luangwa Valley anti-poaching unit), poaching is rife even in the most heavily patrolled areas of the Luangwa Valley. It is common practice for a trader to supply poachers with ammunition. On the western side of the valley, gangs of ten men armed with two or three rifles descend into the valley with provisions of maize meal and salt to last them for about two weeks. They make camp, changing their location from time to time, and hunt rhinos and elephants. They carry their collection of rhino horns and ivory with them when they leave the valley; and in 1982 they could sell a kilo of rhino horn for US\$ 172 (approximately one-third the world market price) to East and West African expatriate traders residing in Zambian towns.

Since the decline of Zambia's economy in 1976, people have been trying to move their assets overseas. The official value of the Kwacha has fallen 73 per cent in relation to the dollar, and the difference between the bank rate and the unofficial rate of the Kwacha is now three to one. Ivory and rhino horn are obvious choice items to buy for the purpose of exchanging them abroad for hard currencies.

The demand for rhino horn has increased so greatly that fake rhino horns are being sold to unsuspecting buyers in Zambia. In comparison with the fakes in Asia, these are fairly well made, and consist of wood or fibreglass and resins. Without examining their base, it is hard to distinguish them from genuine horns. Each is individualised. Some are covered with blood and urine to simulate an 'authentic' odour, and others have rhino-like hair glued to them. The Zambian fake rhino horns first appeared on the market in late 1983, and they are now widespread in the towns. Bags of rhino horns, in which real horns are on top and fakes beneath, are known to have changed hands a few times before the deception was discovered. It is not against the law to possess a fake horn, but it is illegal to sell it under false pretences, and members of the National Parks do confiscate them. This is rather a pity because they have caused chaos on the market. There are

reports of several having been smuggled into Malawi where members of a foreign embassy purchased them. It is doubtful, though, whether the fakes move outside Africa. Real Zambian rhino horn finds its way to Burundi, the Sudan and Djibouti for re-export to Europe and North Yemen.

The rhino population in Zambia is indeed under threat, and because the pressure is not likely to lessen soon, measures should be taken to improve the prospects for at least some of the rhinos. One suggestion is to fence the tourist area around Mfuwe in the Luangwa Valley. In concentrating on a small area, better security for the animals could be maintained.

There are at least 1,650 rhinos in Zimbabwe, the only country in tropical Africa where they are actually increasing in number. However, in early 1985 rhino poaching broke out in the Zambezi Valley between Kariba and Kanyemba where, according to Zimbabwean Chief Ecologist David Cumming, there were at least 750 rhinos. By September 1985, 52 were known to have been killed. Reliable sources say that the poachers, most of whom use .375 rifles, are well organised gangs of Zambians who cross the Zambezi river in dug-out canoes manned by Zambian fishermen. One boatman was offered US\$ 400 to transport poachers across the river into Zimbabwe and back the next day. The poachers' porters are said to be paid US\$ 45 a day, a very high sum.

Heavy rains in 1985 obliterated foot prints of rhinos and poachers, making it difficult to track either, but it is feared that there are more rhino carcasses yet to be recovered. The government has increased patrols in the area and has also sent in troops of the Zimbabwean Special Forces, a unit trained for anti-insurgency bush warfare and attached to Prime Minister Mugabe's Central Intelligence Organisation. The Special Forces have caught poachers with ammunition and rhino horn. Besides there is tight security in Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa, the poachers are unlikely to try to smuggle the horn south, but in going back across the river to Zambia, they cannot be followed by the Zimbabweans.

Zimbabwean authorities were quick to react to the poaching problem, but even with highly trained and excellent defence, full protection cannot be granted to rhinos in the Lower Zambezi Valley because the international border runs through the Zambezi

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river. Recognising their vulnerability, the authorities decided that some of the rhinos should be moved and, accordingly, translocated 63 to Hwange National Park, which now has about 200 black rhinos and is becoming an important breeding sanctuary for these animals.

In 1981 Markus Borner carried out a census in the Selous National Reserve of southern Tanzania and estimated that there were 3,000 rhinos. Due to the remoteness of the Selous and its poor communications, conservationists were generally complacent about the rhinos there. Now, however, rhinos are being poached in the Selous; both Borner and Douglas-Hamilton believe that this became serious in 1983. Since no large quantity of Tanzanian rhino horn has appeared on the international market during the past two years, it is unlikely there has yet been a massive reduction of the population, but action should now be taken to give protection to the Selous. This area is presently undergoing development and is no longer as remote as it was. More aerial surveys should be made, co-ordinated with ground support to inform anti-poaching units where the largest numbers of rhinos are situated; also, there should be investigation into the poaching and trading connections within Tanzania. Tanzania needs the financial backing of international conservation organisations in order to be able to protect the rhinos, and the sooner this comes about, the better.

Protecting rhinos in the wild is essential. Equally important is to attack the root cause of poaching: the trade in rhino horn. Action on this front has begun. In July 1985, the World Wildlife Fund, with assistance from the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife, started sponsoring a major international project to curtail the demand for the horn, which is used in Eastern Asia for medicinal purposes (not aphrodisiacs) and in North Yemen for dagger handles.

The North Yemen government brought in a law on 22 August 1982, which prohibits rhino horn imports, but it is not being adequately enforced. The government is now being urged to join the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the secretariat of which has power to initiate disciplinary action against recalcitrant members. In addition, it is being suggested that the North Yemen government should eliminate all taxes and import duties on cow horn, water buffalo horn, etc. which can be used for making dagger handles.

Rhino products are in demand in Singapore, Macao, South Korea and Brunei, countries into which it continues to be legal to import them. Moreover, Thailand, Indo-



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*In Zimbabwe in the early 1980s, each rhinoceros horn obtained by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management was marked with a steel punch dye for security purposes.*



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*A collection of 88 black rhino skulls, the great majority of which have come from poached animals, on display in South Luangwa National Park, Zambia, 1983.*

nesia and Malaysia are still importing rhino products although such trade is now forbidden. Japan and China process rhino horn into tablets. The latter country exports these in bulk to most cities of Southeast Asia. The new international project to stop the rhino horn trade will concentrate on persuading senior government officials in these countries to close down their legal and illegal trade. Importers, wholesalers, pharmacists and doctors will be strongly urged to use substitutes such as saiga antelope horn instead. Briefing documents will be circulated amongst these people, and prices will be closely monitored to check whether the demand increases or decreases and, where necessary, stronger pressure will be initiated.

A widespread public awareness programme will address the rhino crisis, undertaking a mass media campaign in newspapers and public displays and on radio and television. This will stress the urgency of reducing the demand for rhino products in order to save not just the black but all the rhino species from extinction in the wild. Hopefully, these new measures to halt the trade will be backed by conservationists worldwide. Only by a concerted effort will we save rhinos.

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*Fake rhinoceros horns can be found for sale in several Zambian towns.*